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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [IS](#) [SY](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: MINISTER HAMADEH DISCUSSES HIS UN
MEETINGS, FRET ABOUT SAUDI DIPLOMACY

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b)

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SUMMARY

1. (C) In a 3/5 meeting with the Ambassador, March 14 leaders Marwan Hamadeh and Ghattas Khoury described their recent meeting with UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon in New York during which they argued that Chapter VII action may be the only realistic way to establish the Special Tribunal. They promised the SYG that they would exhaust all other constitutional remedies before resorting to Chapter VII, but urged the SYG, as well as the French ambassador to the UN, to prepare for a GOL request in the very near future. They said the issue of arms smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border came up a number of times during their meeting and indicated that (unlike themselves) Ban Ki-Moon seemed unconvinced of the severity of the problem in the absence of compelling evidence. Concerning the recent swirl of public statements by opposition leaders hinting at a possible imminent solution to Lebanon's political impasse, Khoury warned it could all be a set-up, designed to trap Saad Hariri into accepting a bad deal or, barring acceptance, portraying the pro-reform movement as obstructionist. End summary.

2. (U) Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh and Hariri loyalist MP Ghattas Khoury met the Ambassador and Special Assistant at the Hamadeh residence in Beirut on March 15. Hamadeh and Khoury discussed their recent visit to the U.S., during which they and Druse leader Walid Jumblatt met with new UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and his close advisors in New York, following their meetings with Executive and Congressional leaders in Washington. Minister Hamadeh expressed deep appreciation for the generous reception they received in our capital and were particularly grateful for the opportunity to discuss Lebanon's situation at length with the President.

3. (C) Minister Hamadeh believes the time is fast approaching when Chapter VII action may be required if the Special Tribunal is to have any chance of seeing the light of day. He indicated this was the primary message they carried into their meetings with SYG Ban Ki-Moon, his close advisors, and representatives from the UN Office of Legal Affairs, including Nicolas Michel. Hamadeh said he believed the SYG was well-briefed on the situation in Lebanon, but was still trying to understand all its dimensions before committing himself to a specific action. According to Hamadeh, Ban Ki-Moon wanted to see all of Lebanon's constitutional efforts exhausted first, before the international community

considered other approaches such as Chapter VII.

¶4. (C) An interesting side note is that Hamadeh had the impression from this meeting that UN Secretariat OLA chief Nicolas Michel is now sympathetic to the use of Chapter VII and did not want to see the present UN-GOL tribunal documents modified in any significant way. (Michel: "...it's a good product....it doesn't politicize the process....and it fits the situation...") Hamadeh also said that UNIIIC chief Serge Brammertz has apparently informed his UN superiors that his commission will not hand over any names or evidence to any organization except a fully functioning Special Tribunal. Brammertz reported that witnesses have said that they will only offer testimony to an international tribunal, as they do not trust the Lebanese judicial system. According to Hamadeh, this development has put the UN Security Council in a difficult position: in the event of continued obstruction by Syria and others, either it forcibly establishes the tribunal, or suffer an ignominious diplomatic defeat as the tribunal fails to materialize because of the Syrian obstruction.

LEBANON'S CHAPTER VII STRATEGY

¶5. (C) Partly to meet the SYG's concerns, but also because the pro-reform March 14 leadership wants to be seen fully supporting the constitutional process, Hamadeh said the following steps would be taken before a final appeal is made to the UN Security Council. First, PM Siniora would send the official text of the UN-GOL tribunal documents to Speaker Nabih Berri in advance of the scheduled March 20 opening of parliament. This was designed to preclude the ever-calculating Berri from resorting to a hollow procedural

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device to avoid dealing with the issue: Berri could not claim that he never received the text. Next, on or about March 28 (to coincide with the Arab Summit in Riyadh), the pro-reform majority in parliament (currently 70 members) would petition the Speaker for a parliamentary session with the intent to have a simple up/down vote on the tribunal documents. Additionally, the pro-reform March 14 movement would give the Arab Summit an opportunity to resolve Lebanon's political impasse in an acceptable manner.

¶6. (C) If, however, the situation remains unchanged (no mutually acceptable resolution), the Siniora government would send an official request to the SYG outlining what the Lebanese had done and requesting that the UN establish the already-sanctioned Special Tribunal by Chapter VII authority. At the same time, the GOL would launch an intensive diplomatic effort, especially with the current non-permanent members of the Security Council, to explain the non-sustainable situation in Lebanon and ask for the support of those countries in a council vote. Their principal argument would be that without the Special Tribunal, Lebanon will likely drift toward civil war. Whereas the Syrians claim that the Special Tribunal will lead to civil war in Lebanon, the March 14/GOL argument will take the opposite approach, that the lack of a Special Tribunal is what risks provoking a civil war. Hamadeh, for one, is cautiously optimistic that this diplomatic effort would be successful.

¶7. (C) Regarding the permanent members of the Security Council, Hamadeh referred to Walid Jumblatt's meeting on 3/2 with the French ambassador to the UN, which was held immediately following his delegation's meeting with the SYG. Hamadeh reported that the French remain unconvinced a Chapter VII effort would succeed. And they gave a dire warning to the Lebanese: if a Chapter VII resolution is introduced and it goes down in flames, it would be extremely difficult for the pro-reform government to survive.

FEAR OF AN UNSATISFACTORY SAUDI COMPROMISE

¶8. (C) Looking at the larger political picture, both Hamadeh and Khoury cautioned the Ambassador that there were several indications the Saudi regime may be listening to the siren's call of the 19-11 formula in order to achieve the establishment of the tribunal. They also fear that Saad Hariri, who has been summoned a number of times in the past few weeks to Riyadh to patiently wait for the results of Saudi-Iranian diplomacy, may not have the strength to withstand Saudi pressure to conform -- even if the final deal is clearly an unsatisfactory one.

¶9. (C) Khoury believes the just-completed visit of President Ahmadinejad to Riyadh and the opaqueness of the now six-week old negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are clearly worrisome. Similarly, both Nabih Berri and the leadership of Hizballah have raised popular Lebanese expectations over the past few days that a solution to the crisis may be just around the corner. Khoury argued these actions increase the pressure on March 14 to accept an agreement, even if it means all the concessions come from them. Even Hamadeh, who usually takes the long view and is less prone to nervousness, is concerned that King Abdullah may agree to a poor deal in order to preserve Sunni-Shia amity at the expense of a democratic Lebanon.

¶10. (C) Both Hamadeh and Khoury asked if the U.S. could use its good offices with Saudi Arabia to warn them of the possible trap being laid by Iran and Syria. They promised on their end to buttress Saad Hariri and to the greatest degree possible, stay close by him to offer advice as the pressure increases, which they expect will occur as the important Arab Summit approaches. The Ambassador did warn them, however, that the pro-reform movement has to do more than just block bad initiatives. Sooner rather than later, March 14 has to take the lead and clearly explain what is at stake to an increasingly anxious (and tired) Lebanese people.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) A few hours after our meeting with Hamadeh and Khoury, their paranoia about a Saudi deal with the pro-Syrian March 8 movement at the expense of the March 14/GOL soared to even higher peaks: Hamadeh was summoned to Saudi Arabian Ambassador Abdulaziz Khoja's house, where Khoja, explaining

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that he was meeting with a number of Lebanese political leaders, floated the idea of convening Lebanon's national dialogue in Saudi Arabia to forge an understanding on the special tribunal and an expanded cabinet. Hamadeh told us by phone that he was convinced that Khoja, if not his government, had been so entranced by the idea of having a Lebanese "Mecca" deal in advance of the Arab summit that he simply accepted Nabih Berri's 19-11 cabinet proposal without question, putting the March 14 movement in the spoiler role. Khoja, according to Hamadeh, used Nabih Berri's points to explain the Saudi invitation, almost to suggest that acceptance of Berri's ideas was the price of admission.

¶12. (C) Fearful of what Khoja might be up to, Hamadeh and other March 14 leaders were thus sparked to action, providing Saad Hariri (still in Saudi Arabia) with arguments to use with the Saudis overnight against Berri's approach. By this morning (3/6), Khoja had been called back to Saudi Arabia for further consultations, and the March 14/GOL fear of Saudi acceptance of the March 8 arguments seems to have receded. (We expect that the Saudis were never as fully naive about Berri's ideas as Hamadeh and Ghattas feared.) We expect that, as it becomes clear that the "deal" hinted at by Berri and Hizballah over the past few days is not in fact coming together, the pro-Syrians will point their fingers at the United States for "blocking" what will be called by the pro-Syrians as a reasonable way forward. We saw both

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and PM Fouad Siniora today,
and we will report septel their differing approaches to how
to address the current political crisis. End comment.

FELTMAN